

## CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY  
The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin ValleyOral History Program

## Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Viola Elizabeth Shackelford Holliday and Grover Cleveland Holliday
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Board Camp, Polk County, Arkansas Mt. Ida, Montgomery County, Arkansas
INTERVIEWER:	Michael Neely
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	March 2 and 9, and April 14, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Arvin, Kern County
NUMBER OF TAPES:	6
TRANSCRIBER:	Barbara Mitchell

## PREFACE

It was a real pleasure to have Mr. and Mrs. Holliday as interview subjects. They were always gracious and hospitable. They took me into their home and lives in such a way that I felt like a son. They have known many trials and much sadness. Mrs. Holliday was overcome at times during our taping and we took pauses as necessary. Mr. Holliday has a warm and kind countenance that forces one to see the goodness in life. I gained much from them personally in addition to an interesting and very honest interview.

Michael Neely  
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Viola Holliday (Age: 65)

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATED: March 2, 1981

M.N.: This is an interview with Viola Holliday for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Michael Neely at 25421 Judith Street, Arvin, California on March 2, 1981 at 2:00 p.m.

M.N.: Why don't we start with the first thing you remember.

Holliday: The first thing I remember was going with my uncle to the mailbox during World War I.

M.N.: Where was this?

Holliday: It was in Arkansas. He told me that if he got a brown envelope it meant that Uncle Sam was sending him to war. I thought we really had an Uncle Sam and that if he burned this letter Uncle Sam wouldn't know that he got it. That way he wouldn't have to go.

M.N.: What was your uncle like?

Holliday: He was kind of tall, dark, and very handsome really with curly hair. I can't remember ever having seen my father because my mother and father were separated.

M.N.: How did you come to be with your uncle?

Holliday: He lived at home. He wasn't married. We were at my grandmother's.

M.N.: Do you remember what the house was like?

Holliday: It was a wooden house with boards and no screen doors or windows, a latch with a string on it that you pull for the door. It had a pear tree out in front and a silver maple.

M.N.: How many people lived there?

Holliday: My grandmother, my grandfather, two uncles, my mother, my two sisters and myself.

M.N.: What kind of farming did they do?

Holliday: My step-grandfather was from Kentucky and he raised some tobacco, cotton, a lot of corn and peas to pick to make dried peas and feed for the stock. We had cows, horses, and pigs.

M.N.: What was your grandfather like?

Holliday: He was a wonderful person. He really was. We were hauling rocks one time, I must have been four or five years old, and we were throwing them up into the wagon. I missed and didn't get it quite in there. It fell back down and hit him in the head. I guess it almost knocked him out. Like to scare me to death.

Sometimes I would think that he was terrible because he would yell out. Being small you don't know whether they're scolding you or what. Once we were all down at the barn. He sent me to the house to get the plow lines off the piazza. Well, I went to the house and when I went in the yard I saw the plow lines. I got them and I looked and looked and looked. He couldn't spare anymore time. He said, "Where are those plow lines?" I said, "Well, I found the plow lines but I cannot find the piazza." He just literally fell over laughing. Piazza was a porch. The plow lines were on the porch.

M.N.: What year was it that your uncle got the envelope?

Holliday: 1918. The only thing I remember right at that time was skipping with him to the mailbox. I remember when he got the letter. I can't remember him leaving. I can remember when they brought him back with this big flag over the casket.

M.N.: When is the next period that you remember?

Holliday: I guess it was when we were in and out at my grandparents. My mother remarried when I was about four. My grandparents didn't like him. We would go out and she would take us. She would go out with him and she would have to pull her wedding ring off at night before she got back home.

M.N.: What was your mother like?

Holliday: She was one of the sweetest persons you ever saw. My father was real sweet too. I never saw him but I've always loved him just as much as my mother, sometimes I think even more. Maybe it's because I didn't see him.

I went to these medicine shows that would come through the country.

They had somebody that could answer all your questions. I asked them if my father was dead. They said he wasn't. My family told me he was but I wouldn't believe them.

M.N.: How did you come to find out what happened to him?

Holliday: I was five years old. We lived not too far from my grandmother. We went over to her house. She met us out in front of the yard and put her arms around us. She was crying and she told us that he died in a hospital during surgery. He wanted to come by and see us. She was afraid it would cause trouble so she wouldn't let him come. She didn't answer the letter.

M.N.: Did you understand what had happened?

Holliday: Yes. We had lost several of my baby sisters.

M.N.: Where was the farm?

Holliday: It was eight miles out of Mena.

M.N.: How did you get news on the farm?

Holliday: I think there were those kinds of phones you rang and everybody would listen to everybody else talk. I can't remember us having one. We didn't get news too much. We had a paper once a week called Mena Star. We still take it.

M.N.: Did you go to town very often?

Holliday: Maybe once a month. One time I made a trip with my grandfather. I was about four years old. We had to start way before daylight to haul water-melons in to sell them at a big wagon yard. There was a big spot there where they would tie the mules up. You had to go early before the sun got hot. We were going down the road. There must have been a comet because it was a huge light. It was much too big for a star and it went right along the side of us out in the fields. It was just so bright.

My mother was getting a divorce. It had to be when I was about four because she was going into town to get it. They were going in the wagon, she and my step-grandfather. I followed the wagon for about a mile. My uncle ran and caught me. I wanted to go. I thought if I went I'd see my father or I could keep them from getting a divorce. I don't know what I was going to do but I wanted to go.

M.N.: Do you remember the town?

Holliday: Oh yes. The main store was on a corner and everybody would congregate. Every Saturday they would have a drawing. That was called Petty's Corner and the store was out in front.

M.N.: Did they have dances?

Holliday: Oh yes. Of course it was a sin. We'd go to a dance and tell our folks it was a party. There was a family that lived just up on the hill from us. They had two boys about our age. If they would go my sister and I would go. After we'd get there, we'd dance. When they went we would have music because one played the violin and one played the guitar. One night, after I started going with my husband, we got tired. It was about three miles down there for this party. We stopped right in the middle of the road. There were several, about four couples and we had a square dance there and then went on to the party.

M.N.: Do you remember those boys' names?

Holliday: Ruel and Frobin Bain. They had a little brother named Jerry.

M.N.: What would you do when you got to one of these dances?

Holliday: They'd start playing. If there was no musical instrument, they'd sing it and we'd dance from the singing. Someone would stand out there and call it and sing.

M.N.: It was square dancing?

Holliday: Yes. Also round dancing and the flea hop was in then.

M.N.: Did you do the Charleston?

Holliday: Oh yes. I did that on the stage once. I entered the old fiddlers' contest for square dancing.

M.N.: Did you win?

Holliday: No. I had to dance with a group because somebody didn't show up. I wouldn't dance with my group because I didn't want to dance in the contest. They had someone that didn't show up. They couldn't dance if I didn't dance with them so I danced with them. I had never danced the dance before. They didn't get very far.

M.N.: What other things did you do for fun?

Holliday: Back there you lived close to the woods. We built little houses out of rocks. We would take leaves off of trees and pin them together with pine needles. There was a creek close by where we could go fishing. One time I can remember my mother went down after a big rain and it had flooded. We caught several that day and I caught an eel. Like to scare me to death. We'd catch them and throw them in a big number three wash tub we used for Saturday baths. People would wash down at the creek. They'd just leave their tubs and their washing materials down there to wash their clothes. We'd boil them. That's the only way we had to wash until we came to California.

M.N.: Do you remember how they washed the clothing?

Holliday: You have this rub board. You just rub them up and down. You used lye soap. We made our own soap. You have a vat that you put ashes in and you pour water through it and it drips down. It makes lye. You take that lye and make your soap. You put it with fat.

M.N.: Was that good soap?

Holliday: Oh, very. They still make it, probably as good as some of what we get today.

M.N.: How long would it take you to do the laundry?

Holliday: One-half day. I scrubbed all my floors with lye water. I had to carry the water up the hill because the well was down at the barn. The house was on top of the hill. I did my washing and hung it out on a barbed wire fence. I swept the yard, didn't have grass, but I swept the yard to clean it. I'd pick up Netta Lou who was a year old and our oldest and we'd go to my grandmother's to spend the afternoon. That was a mile and a half away. We might go out in the woods around there to look for hickory nuts. There were a lot of hickory trees and they have delicious nuts on them. When they were dry you'd crack them. They're smooth, very good and tasty.

M.N.: Was life fun?

Holliday: Yes. It was. We didn't know but what we had about anything that anybody else had. Everybody around was about the same. My grandmother and grandfather were pretty well off. They lost when the Depression started. The bank closed and they lost. Thank goodness they had some of their money in two banks. They had some money. I don't know how much. I was too little to know. They owned several acres. They had cattle and pigs. They farmed and they raised everything they ate.

M.N.: Was it good land?

Holliday: Yes. He would terrace the hillside so it wouldn't wash away. I had a dream about him after he died. It's really the only one that I remember real plain about him. I thought I saw him come walking across those hills with a suit on. He just looked great.

M.N.: When somebody was sick was there a doctor?

Holliday: Yes. Once we were climbing out on the porch, as usual. We had some sharp pointed chairs. I was climbing up to the top of the porch and I fell and hit myself in the side with the point of a chair. All afternoon I just gasped for breath. I couldn't see a doctor because my grandparents were gone. My mother and step-father were ill most of the time and in the hospital. Just part of the time we would get to be with them. We spent most of our time with our grandparents. When my grandparents got home they got a doctor. They just went and got him in the wagon.

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M.N.: Do you remember what he was like?

Holliday: Not really. I remember going to his office several times. You could see him day or night. He would always come.

M.N.: Was he old?

Holliday: I thought he was. I thought my mother was elderly and she died when she was 33. My father was 27. I don't remember seeing him but I did see his brothers.

M.N.: Did the doctor charge a lot of money?

Holliday: No. If you couldn't pay him and you had a pound of butter or some vegetables, he'd take that. He would take the money if you had it. If you didn't have it, he'd never turn you down.

M.N.: How did people do business?

Holliday: Usually they would take whatever they had into town to sell. They would take it in these wagon yards and people would go there and buy it.

M.N.: Describe the wagon yard.

Holliday: It might have been as big as half an acre. It might have been twice that big. There was a lot of people there. You would take your team loose. You'd always have their feed in the wagon to feed them.

One time, when I was five years old, I went with my mother to pick some cotton. I was picking it and putting it in her sack. I picked a little while and I said, "Mom, I just can't pick this cotton. I just can't stoop over."

One other time I went in and she was crying. I tried to get her to tell me what was wrong. She said, "Well, you'll understand some day." I was always sure that she was thinking of my father.

M.N.: When did you start school?

Holliday: I started when I was six. I remember how anxious I was to go. It was at Cherry Hill. We lived down there. My sister had started the year before. All year I wanted to go to school and then finally it came my turn to go. Later on we moved down on the river. That was after my brother was born. I was twelve at the time. It was one of the times that my father was working. He was sharecropping.

M.N.: This was your stepfather?

Holliday: Yes. We also had a patch that we did truck farming on. It was a hill with lots of rocks on it. That's where we planted corn and stuff that

took a lot of room. After my grandfather and everybody was gone, there was nobody to plow it but me. I plowed it with a turning plow and mules to break the ground so we could have our truck patch. I also took the double shovel and plowed the corn after the corn came up.

M.N.: What's a double shovel?

Holliday: It's a plow that has two little plows on it with one right behind the other. It throws the dirt.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

Holliday: Just before we moved down on the river, my parents both came down with the flu. I suppose a lot of other people had it. You know, when you don't have a paper, a radio, a television, you don't learn a lot of things. You just know what goes on right in your immediate family and that's about it. They had the flu. My little brother was only three months old and we moved down on the river. It was three miles from school. I hated this place where we moved. I said I wished something would happen that we could move out. Well, my stepfather didn't get over the flu, he died shortly after that. We moved back up to my grandmother's. My mother lived a year and a half after that.

M.N.: What did they do for the flu?

Holliday: I don't remember. His mother lived with us. I think she had tuberculosis. Well, my stepfather died of pneumonia and the flu. I think it had turned into tuberculosis too. My mother got tuberculosis from them and that's what killed her. She wouldn't go to the sanitarium. She wouldn't leave us.

M.N.: Could the doctor do anything for them?

Holliday: Nothing. The night that he died, we walked three miles almost to town. It was so dark. It was raining. There was an eighteen year old girl who was sitting up with us that night. I lost my shoe in the mud in the middle of the road. It was so dark you couldn't see where you were going. We just had to feel our way through to get help.

M.N.: How old were you then?

Holliday: Twelve. Then we moved up to my grandmother's. There was a little house there by her house. Mother got a little better. We were over in the field. She came out and called us and said, "If you're going over there and work for them, they'll have to fix you something to eat. I'm not able." We went to my grandmother's and told her. She got busy right away and moved us up to the house with her. My mother would not go back to the hospital again. She was put in a room with a huge screen over the bed. My little brother was nine months old. My mother's name was Cora and he would come and say, "Hello Cora. How are you?" She was getting hard of hearing by that time. Everybody would holler at her and he'd holler too.

M.N.: How old was she?

Holliday: 33. After she died we stayed on with my grandmother. We couldn't go high school there. Schools weren't like they are here. We went down to my aunt's, stayed for a while, then went to high school. Our teacher where we graduated from the eighth grade taught high school. We just kept going to school and he taught. I can almost see him. He was a very kind man, kind of rugged looking. I would say he was 40. He was very patient. It was a one teacher school. They finally made two rooms out of it. At first it was just one room.

One time we were having a spelling contest. Came time for a friend to spell his words and he tried to spell it. Then, after a while, he said, "Tied." He couldn't spell the word so he just ended up with, "Tied." Kind of fun.

M.N.: You married before you came to California?

Holliday: Yes. I wasn't quite 16.

M.N.: How did you meet your husband?

Holliday: It was at a picnic. We had picnics every Fourth of July. We'd go down on the creek. They had lemonade and homemade ice cream.

It was a year before I saw him again. I went with him one time and then it was about six months before we went together again. We went together for six months and got married.

M.N.: You dated?

Holliday: Mostly church. That was about all there was. Oh, we'd go to singings and whatever.

M.N.: What made you decide that he was the one?

Holliday: I knew he was a good person. I thought an awful lot of him. I guess that's what made up my mind. I never had a home and that's really the first home I ever had.

M.N.: What was the wedding like?

Holliday: We were sitting in the front seat of a car. We were in town and the preacher said he'd marry us in the afternoon. He was hauling a load of hay on a wagon. I told him, "No, I can't. I have to have my new dress." So he said, "Okay. You go and get your dress and catch the wagon. I'll get down and marry you." We went back the eight miles. I got dressed and we turned around and went back. He was on the other side of Mena going in the opposite direction. He pulled over to the side of the road and stopped. Grover and I were in the front seat. Grover was driving and his father and sister were in the back seat.

M.N.: You were fifteen?

Holliday: Yes.

M.N.: And Grover was nineteen?

Holliday: Yes. We started to get out of the car. He said, "Oh no, don't do that." He came over and stood by the car door and married us in the middle of the Tallahaney Highway.

M.N.: Did you have a marriage license?

Holliday: Yes.

M.N.: How much was it?

Holliday: \$2. That was a lot of money. The movies cost us a nickel.

After we got married, we took my grandmother's car back home. We stayed at his place. He lived with his parents and we lived with them for two months. That's where we spent our honeymoon.

M.N.: Were you excited when you got married?

Holliday: Yes. I had never seen a formal wedding. I didn't know what it was like. I have always wished I could have had one. Our daughters, daughter-in-law and son had beautiful weddings. Back then, out in the country that way, there wasn't any.

M.N.: Then what happened?

Holliday: We moved out and he started farming on his own. That was sharecropping.

It was a little three room house. He farmed with his dad that year. The next year he rented another place. It had a lot of land and a bigger house. It had five rooms with no furniture to go in them.

M.N.: You had an outhouse?

Holliday: House and a path.

M.N.: You used wood?

Holliday: Yes.

M.N.: Who gathered the wood?

Holliday: He did.

M.N.: What was your daily routine?

Holliday: We'd get up about five and get breakfast and everything over with. We had meat. We kept chickens so we had eggs. We had a garden. We made biscuits every morning. Wood stoves are good to cook on.

M.N.: How long would it take you to get breakfast?

Holliday: Oh, I would guess 45 minues.

M.N.: Was the food good?

Holliday: I hadn't cooked a whole lot. He says that I could even beat his mother's cooking. So I guess so.

M.N.: How did you do the dishes?

Holliday: We boiled the water. We had a dish pan. We made soapy water with our lye soap. We put them over in another dish pan and scalded the dishes, dried them and put them away.

M.N.: You had a well?

Holliday: Yes, at the second place we lived. At the first place we lived, we had to carry water from his folks' place which was a quarter of a mile.

M.N.: At the second place you had a well right there on the farm?

Holliday: It had one of those long buckets about three feet long. They weren't very big around but they were long. You dropped the bucket down in and pulled it out.

M.N.: After breakfast?

Holliday: He would go milk the cows. He usually milked the cow or cows while I was fixing breakfast. Then he would eat and go to the field to work.

M.N.: What would you do after he left?

Holliday: I would usually sew dresses or quilts. My sister and I made a string quilt in one day. That was when we were quite young. I loved every minute of it. Taught myself to crochet even a doll cap, just shaped it. I made shirts for my husband sometimes.

M.N.: Was your clothing store bought?

Holliday: I made it.

M.N.: Did your husband come home for lunch?

Holliday: Yes. Our favorite meal was a fried pie with cinnamon, butter, sugar, and milk. I can't remember the soups and vegetables but I can remember

these fried pies we loved so much.

M.N.: How long would he stay home for lunch?

Holliday: Until he got ready to go back. It depended on how busy he was and how much needed to be plowed.

M.N.: How did you spend your afternoons?

Holliday: Taking a nap. Sometimes I'd go someplace. Of course, after I had the baby, she kept me busy.

M.N.: Did you have a doctor when you had the baby?

Holliday: Yes. I didn't see a doctor until the night she was born. We almost didn't get him then. His brother was sick and our neighbor had to go get my grandmother's car and go to Mena to get another doctor.

M.N.: What year was your daughter born?

Holliday: We were married December 12, 1931 and she was born November 28, 1932.

M.N.: I'd like to go back and ask how you found out about the Depression.

Holliday: I remember it but I can't remember it hurting us. We had always lived that way. We went on vacation. Took my grandmother to see some of her relatives out in Oklahoma. She had been to the bank that afternoon and deposited some money. We had a wreck going 25 miles an hour. She got the car fixed. They looked at the name of the bank on the check and looked at her and said, "Didn't you know that this bank didn't open this morning?"

M.N.: That's the only warning you had?

Holliday: That's no warning. Luckily she had some in both banks.

M.N.: You got the money back?

Holliday: No, not from the one that went broke. She got a little bit. Nobody got any money. They were very angry, especially when you go and deposit one afternoon and they know they're not going to open the door the next morning. That's unforgiveable.

My grandmother had loaned a lot of people money. These people were not able to pay her back. Some of them could have that didn't.

M.N.: Did that change your life?

Holliday: Not really. We went ahead with our gardening and growing things just like we'd always done. My grandmother had a little pension from the insurance money for my uncle. That helped.

M.N.: Do you remember who was President during the Depression?

Holliday: I can remember people talking about him. I think everybody hated President Hoover.

M.N.: Did they feel it was his fault that there was a Depression?

Holliday: That's the way I remember it. It seemed like they did blame him.

M.N.: Do you remember Roosevelt's election?

Holliday: Well, everybody seemed quite relieved. I think they thought that he would bring them out of it.

M.N.: Why did they think he could pull them out of it?

Holliday: Maybe it was his charisma, his strength, being so sure of himself. I can't explain it. I was still quite young.

M.N.: Did things improve after he was elected?

Holliday: I think so. Naturally he couldn't help the dust storm they had in Kansas and Oklahoma.

M.N.: What's the first thing you remember about that?

Holliday: They started talking about Kansas had blown away. They just were ruined.

M.N.: You didn't see the dust storms yourself?

Holliday: No.

M.N.: You had your daughter and you didn't have any trouble with her.

Holliday: They had to take her with instruments. She was a year old in November and in March she got bronchial pneumonia. We almost lost her. They said, "Don't let her get whooping cough." So we kept her home. Somebody came and brought their little girl who had whooping cough. She got whooping cough but it didn't hurt her.

M.N.: What did you do for her?

Holliday: My husband's uncle was a doctor. He came to see her. We got a nurse to stay with us. The doctor said we had to have a nurse. She was too sick. She had to have shots and her heart was bothering her. She just turned black and dropped. They said she's got to have these shots and I want somebody that's going to be here all the time to give them to her. The nurse said she wouldn't give them. I said, "Won't nobody give them? I'll give them myself."

M.N.: You gave the shots?

Holliday: I gave her 65 shots in two weeks time.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

M.N.: How did you find out how to give shots?

Holliday: The doctor showed me. She had to have one every fifteen minutes for her heart. Some of them were farther apart. I knew what medicine I was supposed to give her. I had to boil the syringes and everything.

M.N.: How long did the nurse stay with you?

Holliday: She stayed about two weeks. She stayed there day and night. She was just a practical nurse. She was not an R.N. [Registered Nurse].

M.N.: Your daughter got better.

Holliday: We moved to Cherry Hill. They had this WPA [Works Progress Administration] going. That gave everybody a little break. It was like one of these government projects. My husband had to walk five miles one way. Work all day and walk back five miles. The pay was very little, but when you needed it it was a lot.

He was sort of in between farming. The next year he moved down with his uncle at Pine Ridge and farmed down there.

M.N.: After the WPA?

Holliday: Yes. He didn't like that at all. They were building a bridge.

M.N.: He walked five miles home?

Holliday: Five miles everyday.

M.N.: What time did he leave?

Holliday: It was before daylight and he came home after dark.

M.N.: Did you move with him down to Pine Ridge?

Holliday: Yes. We were having our second baby and we stayed at Cherry Hill until after he was born. Then we moved down there. They built a new house. Didn't get it finished. After he was born in 1937 we moved on down to Pine Ridge.

M.N.: How long after he was born did you wait?

Holliday: Probably two or three weeks. They made you stay in bed a week whether you needed to or not.



M.N.: How did you travel to Pine Ridge?

Holliday: Wagon. It wasn't very far down there.

M.N.: You had a new house?

Holliday: Yes. It wasn't finished. Four of the rooms were finished. One room didn't have the flooring in it yet. That's where we lived when we left for California. We sold our cattle, our wagon, team and crops to get the money to come out on. We didn't live there very long. Bruce was born in 1937 and we came out here in July 1937. It was only a few months.

M.N.: What was your daughter's name?

Holliday: Netta Lou is the oldest one.

M.N.: Your husband wanted to come to California?

Holliday: He had a brother here. He came out the year before.

M.N.: Did that help make up your husband's mind?

Holliday: I guess so. He said ever since he had seen the rows of grapes in geography he wanted to come to California. He wanted to go back to Arkansas and I wouldn't go. We talked about California. I told him, if he wanted to come, I'd come with him. We came out on the train.

His cousin bought his mules, wagon and farming equipment. His uncle bought the crop, which wasn't gathered yet. That way we got enough money to come out on the train. When we got to his brother's we had a box, a suitcase, two kids and a five dollar bill.

M.N.: Before we start talking about California you were living there in Pine Ridge. How did you look at life?

Holliday: I was very tired of just getting by with him working so hard all the time. I felt well, if there is a better way, why not?

M.N.: Were you happy?

Holliday: Oh yes. No trouble. We've never even been separated.

M.N.: Was it hard saying good bye to your friends?

Holliday: Oh, it was awfully hard. My grandmother was getting old and my only sister was still there, but the excitement overcame all the fears and everything, we just came on.

M.N.: What did you think you were going to find?

Holliday: I had no idea. I thought about seeing his brother and sister-in-law.

M.N.: Do you remember the trip?

Holliday: Oh yes. It was fun. I thought we would never get from Mojave to Bakersfield. We got to Bakersfield. The train stopped. We got off and started to cross the track and there was a big puddle of blood. I thought, "Oh, I wish I was back in Mena."

M.N.: Where did you get off the train?

Holliday: In East Bakersfield. We got a taxi and he brought us out and we found our relatives. We weren't sure where to find them. He said for \$5 he'd take us out there and find them.

M.N.: \$5?

Holliday: Can you imagine? We had \$5 left after that.

M.N.: What did you think about the country?

Holliday: It was dark and we couldn't really tell. The next day we could see and we thought it was beautiful.

M.N.: What was your relatives' place like?

Holliday: They lived in a tent house. A tent house is planks on the floor and the sides with a tent over the top of it. During the night you roll that down and in the daytime you roll that up.

M.N.: Did they own it?

Holliday: Yes.

M.N.: What did you think when you saw it?

Holliday: I thought that's all right until you can find something better. We bought us one just like it.

M.N.: How did you do that?

Holliday: We got here on Monday, I think it was the 26th. He went to work on July 30, 1937.

M.N.: And you said you couldn't remember.

Holliday: Well, some things I can. His brother's boy was in an accident and was almost killed. His brother had to be at the hospital all the time.

M.N.: What hospital?

Holliday: Kern General. He worked for Ray Mitchell. He worked there forty years.

M.N.: You mean he started with one guy and stayed there for forty years?

Holliday: That's the only job he had until he retired. He started out raking hay and working some nights. He did off jobs for seven years and then they put him on as foreman. That's where his brother worked. When his brother was at the hospital they put him on because they knew one of them had to work. He started working at 25¢ an hour.

M.N.: Do you remember Mr. Mitchell?

Holliday: Oh yes, very well.

M.N.: Was he from California?

Holliday: No. They came here in 1914.

M.N.: Do you remember where he came from?

Holliday: I believe it was Minnesota.

M.N.: Did he have a big farm?

Holliday: Yes. Just the row crops, around 1600 acres. I guess there were several hundred acres up in the hills. They had wheat and everything.

M.N.: How did you set up housekeeping?

Holliday: We had the two children. We had orange crates for chairs and cabinets. We had a table, a dresser, a bed and a cook stove. It was a ten by twelve tent house. The baby slept with us. There was just one little strip like this and we'd bring in one of those old Army cots every night for the girl to sleep on. We thought nothing of it. We had an ice box too. I wish I still had it. It was oak. You had to put ice in it. We had ice men then. We got ice about twice a week.

M.N.: Do you remember how much it cost to buy ice?

Holliday: Well, ten cents sticks in my mind.

M.N.: Where did you get the food that you used?

Holliday: Down in Arvin at Dan Rubin's Grocery Store. You could take \$5 and buy groceries for two weeks.

M.N.: What kind of food did you eat?

Holliday: I have no idea. I'll tell you why. Our little boy got ill shortly

after we got here.

M.N.: You son?

Holliday: Yes. Bruce. You know how babies lay on their backs and play with their toes and put them in their mouths? He did that all the time when we first got here. He was about five months old. I stood him up one day when he was about eight months old and he just didn't have a muscle in his body that would hold. He was just limp. We knew there was something bad wrong with him. We started taking him to doctors. We took him to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Shriner's Hospital, everywhere we could think of. Nobody could do anything for him. They said he had polio but, since then, I've wondered if he didn't have multiple sclerosis.

He died on March 8 and he would have been three years old on March 16. He stayed in the house with me all the time. He was a very intelligent person. You couldn't call him a baby. He was too grown up. He would never say anything bad at all. He talked up a storm. He could talk as good as anybody. He said, "By gosh." His dad thought that was horrible. He scolded him for it. Bruce kind of puckered up his mouth. His dad stepped out the door and he set there that way. Just like he might cry. As soon as his dad stepped back in the door, Bruce started laughing and hollering, "By gosh, by gosh, by gosh," just as fast as he could. That was so sweet. His father laughed at him too then. We lost him just three weeks before Pat was born. That was our other girl. It was pretty rough.

M.N.: Was your husband satisfied with the work that he was doing?

Holliday: Yes, he was. He enjoyed farming. There was nothing like turning that land and watching things grow. He still loves it.

M.N.: Did your life gradually improve?

Holliday: Yes. They built some apartments over in Sunset Camp, very nice. It's down near Vineland about five miles down Sunset. We were the first family that moved into those apartments. They were lovely apartments. They had an upstairs with bedrooms. They had a bath. We didn't have to heat our water to take a bath anymore. They furnished some of the furniture. I think the rent was \$8 a month. We had two bedrooms. When they built some smaller houses later, we moved from the apartments over into them. Pat was born in 1940 and then, in 1941, we had Jim. When I left the hospital the nurse said, "I'll see you next year." I said, "Oh, no."

M.N.: What hospital was that?

Holliday: Kern General.

M.N.: How did you feel about that hospital?

Holliday: I thought it was great because it was the only one we could afford.

M.N.: Did you get good care?

Holliday: Very good care. Have to sit there all day.

M.N.: Did you feel like it was charity.

Holliday: Yes. In a way, yes. But we had to use it. We had not choice. We had to have the baby to the doctor so many times that it took every dime we could scrape up. You went to the window and you signed in. You'd sit out in the hall and wait and wait and wait and wait some more.

M.N.: About how long?

Holliday: I have spent a day.

M.N.: All day waiting?

Holliday: Yes.

M.N.: To get in and see a doctor?

Holliday: Yes.

M.N.: Were there a lot of people waiting?

Holliday: Sometimes a lot, sometimes not so many.

M.N.: When you saw the doctor, was that brief?

Holliday: Sort of.

M.N.: What was the ward like?

Holliday: It was clean and nice. I guess I had a real rough delivery that time, twelve hours of hard labor. They put the side boards up and I thought they did that to everybody. When I came home I was telling everybody about the side boards that they used. No one knew a thing about it. Come to find out, they just used it because I was climbing the walls.

My sister was there too. She died of Valley Fever. We didn't feel that she got good care. The nurses didn't think she was as sick as she was.

M.N.: What did they do for her?

Holliday: She told us that they told her that she wasn't as sick as she let on

to be.

M.N.: Maybe they didn't know.

Holliday: Well, you know when you've got Valley Fever nobody thinks of you as being that sick.

M.N.: Can you describe what it was like for someone to have Valley Fever?

Holliday: Well, when I took her into the hospital we still didn't know what was wrong. She had a big red place under her throat. I was taking her to a doctor near here. She was all right but her head would hurt her so bad that she couldn't do anything. When I got over to her house she was just looking through me. She didn't even see me. I got her in the car and took her to Dr. DeSchmidt. He said take her to the hospital. I took her to the hospital and when we got up there she still didn't know a thing. When we went back to see her, she knew us and knew things.

M.N.: How old was she?

Holliday: She was 33. She'd just have those spells. She'd have terrific headaches. Said she could just feel something go like that and hit her in the head.

M.N.: Did you know other people who had that?

Holliday: I knew several people that had it. They'd have big old blue spots on their legs. I had it. I had a big test for it but I never broke out. I was draggy and didn't feel good but I didn't really get sick.

M.N.: And you got over it.

Holliday: Well, I don't know. I still run temperatures once in a while.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

M.N.: Let's talk about the years after you got settled.

Holliday: After the children got big enough, I worked some. I worked in a grocery store for about three months. I worked in a dress shop for about three months. Then I worked at the high school for about three years.

M.N.: What did you do there?

Holliday: I worked in the attendance office and I kept books. I just took care of the cafeteria money, the banking and all that stuff.

M.N.: Did you like that?

Holliday: Yes. I liked it. But, I didn't like having a boss so I quit when school started again.

M.N.: What year was that?

Holliday: 1953. I went to beauty college. I finished the course which is supposed to take nine months in eight months. Then I put in my own shop. I also put in a dress and yarn shop with it. I got interested in clothes when I was small. I cut out a slip with a case knife, used flour sacks to make it.

M.N.: Did your beauty shop do well?

Holliday: Yes, until I got sick. I had to sell it. I had back surgery. I had to sell it in 1965. We built the one down in Arvin, a new one. I like working for myself and being my own boss. I didn't feel that I wanted somebody else being my boss. Sometimes you can't tell whether they're pleased or not pleased. Maybe everybody's not that way. Maybe some people just don't care whether they're pleased or not but it would bother me if I felt they weren't pleased.

M.N.: Did you more or less retire after your back surgery?

Holliday: Yes. I haven't worked. Well, I did work some. I worked at the convalescent hospitals for several months in the beauty shops.

M.N.: Did you like that?

Holliday: I liked it except that some of the people couldn't get around too well. They were hard to do. Sometimes you'd have to do them in bed. It was a rewarding job. It really was.

M.N.: How old are you right now?

Holliday: 65. Do I have to tell?

M.N.: You already did. It's too late.

Holliday: As the President said, "I just enjoyed the 30th anniversary of my 39th birthday."

M.N.: How do you feel now looking back on things?

Holliday: Well, I would like to be younger, of course. I think everybody would. I've had a good life. I've enjoyed the good parts of it. I think that the bad parts maybe make you enjoy the good parts more. I guess you would say I'm an artist in many ways. I have done a little painting, a lot of crocheting and embroidery, made quilts and bedspreads.

M.N.: Do you feel life's been fair to you?

Holliday: I think so. I think God has a hand in many things. I think that he is a just God. I might say it wasn't fair but I guess it was.

M.N.: You're satisfied with the way things turned out?

Holliday: Yes. The only thing, one lifetime isn't enough.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1



## CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

## CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY

## The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin Valley

Oral History Program

## Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Grover C. Holliday (Age: 69)

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATED: March 9, 1981

M.N.: This is an interview with Grover C. Holliday for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Michael Neely at 25421 Judith Street, Arvin, California on March 9, 1981 at 2:00 p.m.

M.N.: Let's start with the first thing you can remember.

Holliday: It wouldn't be too exciting. I was probably about three.

M.N.: What do you remember when you were three?

Holliday: Where we lived.

M.N.: You can actually remember that?

Holliday: Yes. When I was about four the entire family got sick except my dad. They called it slow fever. It got pretty serious and looked like some of us weren't going to make it. My uncle came down with his wagon and team. He moved us all to his place. They had a house with a hallway in it. He put us in a room across the hall. Every morning he'd come in there and burn just plain sulfur to fumigate the house. He burned that every morning until we finally got over this thing. Then he had an extra house on his place and we moved into that till we all got able to go again.

M.N.: What year was that?

Holliday: Oh, that was probably about 1916. It was a little community called Highland in Arkansas. We stayed there till we got all straightened out. Then we moved into his house.

M.N.: Do you remember what the sickness was like?

Holliday: It's something like typhoid fever. I never knew what it was other than slow fever.

M.N.: You just felt bad?

Holliday: Oh no. We were in bed. It was real serious.

M.N.: Did people die of it?

Holliday: Not in my family. My oldest brother almost died. He had to learn to walk again.

M.N.: How long was he in bed?

Holliday: I would say a month. It was quite a period.

M.N.: Was it very debilitating?

Holliday: Yes. I guess the sulfur killed all the germs so nobody got it where we moved to.

M.N.: You just had fever?

Holliday: Yes.

M.N.: Did you see a doctor?

Holliday: Oh I suppose they did. Doctors weren't too plentiful out in the country.

M.N.: What happened after that?

Holliday: We moved all the stuff into the rent house. We stayed there until it was all right. My dad started farming again the next year. He rented land but he farmed himself most of the time. Once in a while he'd work out a year for somebody else.

M.N.: Do you remember what crops he farmed?

Holliday: Usually cotton and corn.

M.N.: How big was the place?

Holliday: It could run anywhere from 40 to 160 acres.

M.N.: Do you remember the house?

Holliday: Oh yes, part of them.

M.N.: How about that one that you moved into?

Holliday: It was a large house. It had a 20 by 20 room and a kitchen off the back of that. Along the side they built what they called a lean to.

That ran the full length of the house. That was the sleeping quarters.

M.N.: It was closed in?

Holliday: Yes. They just built the two big rooms originally and then they built that on later.

M.N.: What kind of well did you have?

Holliday: We had spring water. We didn't have a well.

M.N.: How did that work?

Holliday: It's just where water comes up out of the ground the year round. It was just up a little canyon from the house.

M.N.: Did you live in the hills?

Holliday: Oh, it was quite hilly. The farming land was pretty rolling.

M.N.: How long did you stay there?

Holliday: This was in the wintertime. We stayed through all the next year.

M.N.: Do you remember the wintertime there?

Holliday: Some of them were real cold with lots of snow. We made it fine. I always felt that the people in the country were better off than the ones in the city. You had more things to do and you grew all that you ate. It just worked out better. You had your chickens, your hogs, your cows and you grew your own Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, turnips and stuff like that. You had about everything you needed. You didn't have to buy a lot of stuff.

M.N.: What did you do during the winter?

Holliday: We had to go to school after we got big enough. We would just stay in and play around. You couldn't get out too much when it was really cold.

We farmed around that neighborhood for probably two or three years. Then we moved back to Oden. That first year down there my dad worked for a forest ranger. That was the year of the eclipse of the sun. It got so dark the chickens went to roost.

M.N.: What year was that?

Holliday: That was about 1920. I'm guessing. I was probably eight years old.

M.N.: Do you remember the eclipse?

Holliday: Oh yes, very well.

M.N.: Did you know what it was?

Holliday: My parents told me. It was a real experience to turn dark in daylight. It was quite an experience.

M.N.: Do you remember your school?

Holliday: Yes. Most of my schooling was at Highland. It was just a one room school building. It served for the school and the church too.

M.N.: Did you have paper or slates?

Holliday: We had paper.

M.N.: Did they supply the materials?

Holliday: There wasn't anything furnished. We furnished everything. We had to have our books and writing paper and all that stuff.

M.N.: You're going to have to tell me about it because I don't know.

Holliday: Well, you would have all of your books, your writing material, pencils, and that sort of thing.

M.N.: Where would you buy your books?

Holliday: I don't know whether they bought them in Mena or whether they actually bought them in a little town.

M.N.: They'd go into Mena, Arkansas?

Holliday: Yes. They probably bought the books there. They could have bought them in a little community of Cherry Hill. There were a couple stores but I would say they went to Mena to pick up the books.

M.N.: Do you remember what books they were?

Holliday: They were spelling, arithmetic, language, geography and history.

M.N.: Were you a good student?

Holliday: I would say so.

M.N.: Did you ever get in trouble?

Holliday: No.

M.N.: Do you remember what the teacher looked like?

Holliday: We had two that I remember there at this place. One of them was a

large German fellow. He had this one finger, I guess it had been mashed because it was real flat and we said that that was his spanking hand. The other fellow was a young fellow.

M.N.: You had two male teachers?

Holliday: At different times. I only had one teacher at a time. One teacher had all the classes from one through eight.

M.N.: That wasn't unusual?

Holliday: No, not then.

M.N.: Let's go back to where you had the eclipse.

Holliday: That was Oden in Montgomery County.

M.N.: You lived on a farm there?

Holliday: Yes. It was a fairly large house. I don't remember how many rooms. That was the year that my father worked for the forest rangers. We didn't farm that year.

M.N.: How did he get a job with the forest service?

Holliday: He was working for the forest ranger himself. The ranger had a place and a lot of stock. He took care of the place and the livestock for the fellow.

M.N.: From Oden where did you go?

Holliday: We went to Oklahoma.

M.N.: Do you remember the trip?

Holliday: Yes. We went by train. I was ten years old. This was 1922. We thought it was a long ways. It was but 100 miles or so. I remember getting on the train and the people meeting us when we got there.

M.N.: Who was there to meet you?

Holliday: It was my dad's sister. That was the beginning of a whole new life.

M.N.: What happened that day?

Holliday: It was early in the morning. They lived out in the country about three or four miles. We went by wagon out there.

M.N.: Where did you ride on the wagon?

Holliday: Probably in the back end with my feet hanging out. That's where us

kids all tried to get.

M.N.: Did you stay on that farm?

Holliday: We stayed there for a month with them and then we rented a place a mile away. We farmed there in 1923. We stayed with the same man and we moved onto a large farm in 1924. We stayed with the same man. It was a larger and better farm. It had a pretty good size house, five rooms I would say.

M.N.: What did it look like on the outside?

Holliday: One by twelves just straight up and down. Where they joined together they put a one by four over it to cover the crack.

M.N.: I was seeing it wrong.

Holliday: In 1925 he moved again and then in 1926 he moved back with the same fellow. It made three years that we stayed with that fellow. Then in 1927 he rented 160 acres. We stayed there three more years in Oklahoma.

M.N.: How did your father pay the rent?

Holliday: Well, he paid one-third of the corn and one-fourth of the cotton. If you sharecropped, they furnished the equipment and the animals, it was fifty-fifty right straight across everything.

M.N.: Not a certain amount and then fifty-fifty?

Holliday: Yes. But if you owned your own stock you paid one-third of the corn and one-fourth of the cotton. That was standard rent.

M.N.: You were how old in 1927?

Holliday: I was 14 or 15.

M.N.: When did you start to work?

Holliday: I started working around the farm probably at eight. You could pick a little cotton or you could cut a few weeds. Of course, I didn't do a lot.

M.N.: When did you start working for real.

Holliday: I was about twelve.

M.N.: Do you remember that?

Holliday: When I was twelve, I made a regular hand just like a grown person. I

remember we used to chop cotton in the summertime. I'd draw just the same as anybody else. I carried the same load that anybody else carried then.

M.N.: At twelve how much did you get paid?

Holliday: Probably about \$1 and lunch.

M.N.: How did they feed you?

Holliday: They just invited you into their house. They would just cook a regular meal and you'd sit down to the table with the family and eat.

M.N.: Did they treat you good?

Holliday: Oh yes.

M.N.: They paid you and not your parents?

Holliday: I don't know. My parents were very good to us kids in this way. I'm sure we got what we needed. They weren't that type of people that took everything you made. They didn't do that so I'm sure we got all we needed out of it.

M.N.: Do you remember what a typical day would be like?

Holliday: We'd get up at six o'clock or something like this and do the chores we had to do.

M.N.: What kind of chores would that be?

Holliday: Milking the cows and feeding the pigs. By that time I was driving a team and cultivating.

M.N.: How did you learn how to drive a team?

Holliday: I grew up around them so it just came naturally.

M.N.: What time would you eat breakfast.

Holliday: Around 6:30 a.m.

M.N.: What you would eat for breakfast?

Holliday: Usually meat and eggs. It wasn't bacon like today. We'd kill our own meat and have it cured or cure it. You could slice it up yourself. And eggs, milk, butter and biscuits. My mother would take care of that. She'd do the biscuit making. We ate real well. We were never short of food that I can remember in my entire life. We had a drilled well right out in the backyard. No running water in the house. Drew it by bucket. Had to pull in a rope.

M.N.: How deep was it?

Holliday: Probably 30 or 40 feet. The water level was real high.

M.N.: How far from the house was the outhouse?

Holliday: Probably 50 to 60 yards.

M.N.: You didn't use a Sears Roebuck catalog?

Holliday: I probably did.

M.N.: What time would you go to work?

Holliday: About 7:00 or 7:30 a.m.

M.N.: Take your team?

Holliday: Yes.

M.N.: Did you work for someone else?

Holliday: No. It was usually on our own farm. Might be cultivating cotton, corn, planting or making beds.

M.N.: No one has told me how they hitched up the team.

Holliday: You have to harness them up. You catch your team and harness them all up.

M.N.: Were they mules?

Holliday: No. At this particular time we had horses, probably 1200 to 1300 pounds, that were quite large. You'd just harness them up, take them out, hook them on, and take off.

M.N.: Were they rough?

Holliday: No, very gentle. By then we had a riding cultivators. Before that it was all walking cultivators. The rest of the tools were walking tools but the cultivators were riding cultivators so that took a lot off of you. It had a seat here and you guided it with your feet. Had a couple stirrups out here that you just set your feet in. That's the way you guided the cultivator, straddling the rows with your feet. Whichever way the wheels went, why the plows would automatically follow. Your team walked a straddle of the row.

M.N.: Were they trained to do that?

Holliday: Oh yes.

M.N.: Did you have to train them?



Holliday: That came with the breaking of them. By the time you had them broke real good, why they pretty well knew what to do.

M.N.: Did you ever break one?

Holliday: Yes. I've broken one or two in my time.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

M.N.: I want to know about how you broke them.

Holliday: One time I had a young pair of horses. We'd put the young one with an old one that was already broken. We'd run a rope from his head and his bridle back and tie it to the hames of the other one so he couldn't get away.

M.N.: What's a hames?

Holliday: That's what goes around their shoulders that they pull with. So we'd keep them tied to the other horse until we got to where we could handle him all right. Eventually we'd take the rope loose. It takes quite a bit of time to get one to where you can turn him loose and handle him. But keeping him back there long enough why he'll finally get adjusted. A little later on there I had mules. I had one of those that I wouldn't even have to use a line on. If I wanted him to go right I'd say, "Gee". If I wanted him to go left I'd say, "Haw" and he'd just step over a little bit. I wouldn't even use lines on him.

M.N.: Were mules better than horses?

Holliday: In some cases yes, in some cases no. If you got a good horse, you could use him to ride and for all purposes. Mules are better working animals, but the horses are a little better because you can ride them.

M.N.: Is one smarter than the other?

Holliday: I don't think there's much difference. A mule is maybe more stubborn. He'd rather do what he wants to do than what you want him to do.

In the morning we would take time to brush them down real good before we started to work.

M.N.: Did they like that?

Holliday: Oh yes, most of the time.

M.N.: Why did you do that?

Holliday: Just to take care of them and to make their hair look good. It made them look real nice and their hair would all lay down. Their nature is to lay down and roll in the dirt. We'd brush all that off.

M.N.: Did you get close to them?

Holliday: Oh yes. It's no problem. I don't think a horse will hurt you as quick as a mule. A mule will kick a lot quicker than a horse will.

M.N.: When would you get lunch?

Holliday: About twelve noon. We'd always take an hour. Might even ease in a little nap. Then we'd work till about five o'clock and come in.

M.N.: What did you do when you got home?

Holliday: Well, we'd unharness our teams and feed them. This sort of thing and we'd milk the cows again. The pigs were taken care of. We put in a pretty good day.

M.N.: About how long would it be from the time you got home until you had dinner?

Holliday: Maybe an hour, hour and a half. Not bad.

M.N.: Did you all wash up before you went to dinner?

Holliday: Yes. We did that a lot of times out at the well. We'd have a table or something out near where there was plenty of water. We'd usually do our washing up out there before we even went into the house.

M.N.: What did you have for dinner?

Holliday: Usually my mother would make what we called corn bread. It's ground corn. She'd probably have potatoes fried, stewed or mashed potatoes and milk. We wouldn't eat the same at night as we would in the morning and at lunch. We weren't going to work as hard.

M.N.: What would you do after you ate? Did you have to do dishes?

Holliday: No. There were enough girls in the family so us boys usually got out of that. There were actually nine children, four boys and five girls. That's a big family.

M.N.: What would you do in the evening?

Holliday: My father sang in church a lot. He was the choir leader and director. He always had us help him.

M.N.: Just choral singing?

Holliday: Just choral singing. We did a lot of that. The church we built was about three quarters of a mile from our house. That made it real nice.

M.N.: That was 1927?

Holliday: Yes. The entire community had to go into town to get to church.

Each summer they would hold a revival meeting under a brush arbor. You'd just set up your poles and make a frame around it. Then you'd cover it with brush or a sheet. They called it a brush arbor. That's what they did in the summer.

Later we got together and organized a deal to build a church. A couple gave us a couple of acres. There was a minister that lived right in the community. He was the head of it. We just jumped in there and built it. I thought it was a great big building. I went back in later years and took a picture of it. I couldn't believe it. It was about 20 by 40 [feet]. We thought it was a real big building.

M.N.: What part did you take in building it?

Holliday: Whatever needed to be done. If it was framing, why we framed. If it was floor, we nailed down the floor. I don't remember who was the man in charge but it was someone that knew what to do. We all followed his advice until we got it done.

M.N.: Where did you get the money for it?

Holliday: Out of the community. It didn't take an awful lot of money. We used one by twelves and one by fours and stripped the cracks so it didn't cost a lot of money. As far as I know it's still standing. I think I felt better about that than anything I've ever really done because I actually had a part in that.

M.N.: That's a good feeling, isn't it?

Holliday: It sure is. It sure is. We stayed there through 1927, 1928 and 1929.

M.N.: Were things good for your family?

Holliday: I feel we had a real good life. I can't think of any problems, other than that one sickness, that our family ever ran up against. It was just an ordinary family. Everything went good.

M.N.: What was your dad like?

Holliday: Well, my dad was kind of a small man. He was about one quarter Cherokee Indian. He was a very stern man. When he said something, he meant it. We never doubted it.

M.N.: What would happen to you?

Holliday: Well, I don't know. We just didn't do it. We just felt that when he said something why that was it. We were raised that way from the time we were small on up. What he said was right and we never questioned it. They were fair with us. They weren't mean or anything like that to us at all.

M.N.: Was he a big talker?

Holliday: He didn't talk a lot. I think he had enough Indian in him where he didn't say much.

M.N.: Was he a loving man?

Holliday: Yes. Real easy to get along with if you didn't cross too much. He didn't take much from anybody. One year he decided he'd work in the summer in the coal mines. The man that was over the coal mines was real overbearing and mean. He was a tough man. My dad had a brother working there too. A day or two before my dad went to work the foreman of this coal mine started to cuss my uncle out. My uncle just knocked the handle off of a pick right quick. They had to catch him.

M.N.: You mean he was going to hit this guy with the pick handle?

Holliday: Yes, with the pick handle. So my dad went to work. They were sitting eating lunch. They were talking about how things went and talking about cussing people out. My dad said, "Well, I never took cussing in my life. I wouldn't know how to act." This foreman said, "Well, you sure will never work in the coal mine." Dad said, "Well, that's my second day but if I work here ten years it will be the same thing." The foreman laid him off that night. He was like that. He wasn't hard to get along with. He'd tell you how he felt.

M.N.: Was he an honest man?

Holliday: Oh yes, very honest. He worked pretty hard.

M.N.: I have trouble figuring that kind of man in a church choir.

Holliday: He loved to sing. That's the only thing I know. He loved to sing and he sang as long as he lived. He did a pretty good job. Of course, then everything was shaped notes. Shaped notes are a little different from round notes that they use today. It's a little different music than today's music. Whatever the note is depends on how high you go or how low you go. There's just a little bit of difference. A round note is, I think, a half an octave higher than the shaped notes. He loved singing.

M.N.: What did your father do for recreation?

Holliday: Didn't do a lot. He liked to pitch horse shoes. He read quite a bit. I would say he was an average reader.

M.N.: What did he read?

Holliday: The Bible a lot and other types of books by different authors.

M.N.: Did he encourage you?

Holliday: What he taught us was whatever we did always do it well. Now this

was the thing that he wanted us to do. We didn't have to do certain things, no, but whatever we did, if it was worth doing, do it well.

M.N.: That's quite a gift to give your child.

Holliday: Yes. It is. It don't mean much the first time you hear it, but it covers it all. That's the type he was. If a thing is worth doing, why you do it right. That's the way he lived.

M.N.: What about your mother?

Holliday: She's turned completely different. My mom was completely different. Her side of the family was very religious. She was Irish. This made it completely different. She might fly off and flog us right along. It was completely different. My dad wouldn't do that but she was just that way. She talked a lot.

M.N.: How old was she when she got married?

Holliday: I think she was eighteen.

M.N.: And your father?

Holliday: Nineteen.

M.N.: How old was she when the first child was born?

Holliday: I guess she would have been either nineteen or twenty. They came fairly regular from 1902 to 1924. In twenty years there she had nine children.

M.N.: Describe her.

Holliday: She was real fair complected and blue eyed. He was real dark complected with real dark brown eyes or black eyes almost. He took the Indian color. She was very fair complected and her hair was fairly light. She was a larger person for a woman than he was for a man. She would weigh around 140 pounds. She'd give you anything in the world. She might flog us but it didn't mean nothing.

M.N.: You must have been a very well behaved bunch.

Holliday: Well, no. We weren't that good. We knew how far to go. We knew where to cut it off.

M.N.: Was she affectionate with you?

Holliday: Oh yes. She loved her family. That's one thing for sure. She thought a lot of them right up to her passing away.

M.N.: When was that?

Holliday: I believe it was in 1962.

M.N.: When did your father die?

Holliday: 1952. There was one year's difference in their age. They had a nice long life.

M.N.: How did you get along with the other kids?

Holliday: For a large family we all got along good.

M.N.: Did you sleep in the same room?

Holliday: Yes. You had to with that many kids. You didn't have enough rooms not to. I was the ring nicked one. I was right in the middle. There were four older and four younger than me. I was right in the middle. The oldest was a girl. She was born in 1901. The second was a boy in 1904. The next one was a girl in 1906. My brother just older than me was 1910. I was 1912. My sister just younger than me in 1915. The next one then was 1919. The next one was 1921. The last one was 1924. The last two were girls.

M.N.: What was it like for your oldest sister?

Holliday: Pretty rough. She had to help care for the others. I'm sure that she got a little rougher deal than we did.

M.N.: Were they good kids?

Holliday: Oh, I'd say so. We were average anyway.

M.N.: Were you close?

Holliday: Yes. Real close, especially my brother just older than me and my sister just younger than me, the three of us were extra close.

M.N.: How were you close?

Holliday: Just seemed like my brother and I, instead of chumming around with some other boy, we chummed around together. Then the sister just joined in along with us. He and I always went together.

M.N.: You were very fortunate.

Holliday: Yes, very fortunate. It worked out real good.

M.N.: What happened in that period before your marriage?

Holliday: We built the church in the fall of 1927. We stayed there until 1929 and then we moved back to Arkansas in December. We went to Oden.

My oldest sister happened to live there. She married before we went to Oklahoma. We went to her place and spent Christmas. After Christmas, my dad had a couple brothers that lived about 30 miles away. He went up to their place kind of looking around. One of them wanted to sell out so he bought his brother out and we moved.

M.N.: Where was that?

Holliday: That was just east of Mena in a little place they called Board Camp. It was just about eight miles out of Mena.

M.N.: You were living there when you met your wife?

Holliday: Actually, I met her sometime during the year of 1930. We didn't start going together until 1931.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 2

M.N.: How did you first meet her?

Holliday: Probably at some type of a party. The first time we were ever together was at a picnic they had on the Fourth of July. We weren't together anymore for quite some time. In 1931 we started going together. We didn't have a lot of things to do, just parties and church. You'd just all get together and play games. Of course the old people were pretty strict. Dancing was nearly forbidden. Some of the places we could get away with dancing. As long as we kind of sang a song along with the music we could dance anywhere. We could get away with it that. If you really just wanted straight music and dancing you couldn't get away with that very often. We went to church and singings.

M.N.: Do you remember asking her to marry you?

Holliday: I think she asked me. No, I really don't remember asking her. We just discussed it and talked about it.

M.N.: Did you ask her parents?

Holliday: I never met her parents. She didn't have any parents. Her mother passed away in 1930.

M.N.: Did you talk to somebody in her family?

Holliday: She was living with her grandmother so I talked with her grandmother. She wasn't too happy about it.

M.N.: Was it hard for you to ask her?

Holliday: Well, I've done things a lot easier.

M.N.: Where was she when you asked her?

Holliday: Of all places to catch her by herself, she was in the corn crib. Can you imagine that? I went in the corn crib and told her what we'd like to do. I don't think she said anything for a little bit. She was kind of a stern lady. She didn't say anything for a little bit. Then she asked a few questions. How was I going to do this and that. Pretty soon she said, "If that's what you want, why I have no objections." So from there it was up to us.

M.N.: What kind of wedding did you have?

Holliday: We had a very unusual wedding. We had planned to marry at the court house in Mena. Something happened, I don't remember what now. The minister was meeting us there and he was on his way to another town to preach. I don't remember what it was but Viola had to go back home for some reason. It was about ten miles. The minister had to leave. We came back with my father and sister.

M.N.: You took your wife home?

Holliday: Yes. Then when we came back we just drove down the highway until we caught up with the minister. He had a wagon and a load of hay. He just pulled off to the side of the road and got off. We started to get out of the car and he said to just sit still. So we just sat in the front seat of the car. He went through the ceremony with us sitting there. It must have stuck. We'll have fifty years this December.

M.N.: Did you feel bad about that in any way?

Holliday: No. Only I would have rather married at the court house. It would have been a little better for her. For myself, no, it didn't make any difference.

M.N.: Where did you set up housekeeping?

Holliday: We stayed with my parents about a month. Then we moved into a rented house. I helped my father that year. I had a certain number of acres that were mine of course. I worked with him that year because I used his equipment and his animals. After that, why, we went out on our own.

M.N.: How did your family accept your wife?

Holliday: Oh fine. They got along real well. My mother used to come here and just set by the hour and watch whatever she was doing. They had a real good relationship.

M.N.: Did your mother kind of take her under her wing?

Holliday: Oh, I suppose that's what you'd call it. She didn't have any mother so she kind of looked out for her. It worked out real good that way.



M.N.: How long did you live on this rented place?

Holliday: We moved each year. No use asking me why because I don't know.  
For some reason we moved every year.

M.N.: How long before your first child?

Holliday: We'd been married eleven months when she came along. We were just a couple of kids.

M.N.: Was it frightening to you?

Holliday: It was a little bit to me. It wasn't to Viola. She really wanted a child. To me it was a little frightening because I was only nineteen. That's not an old man by any means. I guess you would say I was a little shaky. She had a very hard time with that one.

M.N.: Did that scare you?

Holliday: Yes. It sure did.

M.N.: Can you remember waiting?

Holliday: Oh yes. I did everything I could to pass the time.

M.N.: So do you fit the picture of the nervous father?

Holliday: I probably fit it to a T. She was in labor so long.

M.N.: You had a doctor?

Holliday: Yes.

M.N.: Did she have the child at the house?

Holliday: Yes.

M.N.: At what point did you go and get a doctor?

Holliday: As soon as the labor got far enough along to where we knew it was the real thing, why we contacted him.

M.N.: How did you contact him?

Holliday: I would say by telephone. There was a telephone a mile away from us.

M.N.: Did the doctor come out in a car?

Holliday: Yes. He had a car.

M.N.: What year was this?

Holliday: November of 1932.

M.N.: No problems after the doctor got there?

Holliday: There were problems all the time. He had to take it really.

M.N.: After the baby was born how did things go?

Holliday: Oh, I was doing fair for a young man. Each year we accumulated a little more.

M.N.: Were you working hard?

Holliday: Not as hard as in later years. They way the seasons were back there made a difference in how you worked. In the wintertime it's real, real cold so there's not much you can do. In the summer you get your crops all laid by so you don't have anything to do there until the middle of July. The middle of September you start the harvest.

M.N.: How is it different out here?

Holliday: Well, out here you've got something growing all the time.

M.N.: Always working.

Holliday: So it does make a difference, yes.

M.N.: So what happened from 1932?

Holliday: In 1936 our second child was born. That was a boy. I was away from home at this particular time. We had rented in another neighborhood and we were building a new house. I wasn't there when he was born. They came and got me but I was a little too late.

In 1937 we got a chance to come out here. I had always wanted to do that anyway from the time I was a youngster in school.

M.N.: What made you decide to come?

Holliday: I had always wanted to come.

M.N.: What was the thing that broke you loose?

Holliday: I had a brother out here. That gave us an opportunity so we just sold out our stuff.

M.N.: You just sold everything?

Holliday: Yes.

M.N.: How did you go about selling? A piece at a time or all at once?

Holliday: Most of it I sold in a lump sum.

M.N.: Did you get a good price for things you sold?

Holliday: I'd say at a fair price. This was 1937 so things weren't booming very much. We got a fair price out of it.

M.N.: Do you remember how much money you had when you left?

Holliday: I know how much I had when I got here but I don't know how much I had when I left.

M.N.: How did you come?

Holliday: By train.

M.N.: Where did you leave from?

Holliday: We left from Mena, Arkansas.

M.N.: How much did you have when you got here?

Holliday: When I got into Bakersfield I had a \$10 bill.

M.N.: And a wife and two kids.

Holliday: Yes. We hired a taxi. We pulled into that station right there on Baker Street. A taxi said for \$5 he'd bring us out. We gave him \$5.

M.N.: What time was it when you got in?

Holliday: Midnight.

M.N.: That's a bad time to get a taxi.

Holliday: Isn't it? For \$5 why he found my brother.

M.N.: Seems like a lot of money.

Holliday: I was glad to pay it at that time of night.

M.N.: You had mentioned something about your mother being born in California.

Holliday: Yes. My grandparents lived in Missouri and they joined up with a wagon train in St. Joseph, Missouri.

I've got to tell you this though. My grandfather and his brother were on horseback and they stopped at my grandmother's house. Now, I don't know whether they stopped for water or directions. I guess her father was a pretty tough old guy. He was standing in the door with a knife in his hand.

M.N.: Your grandfather stopped at your grandmother's house before they were married?

Holliday: Yes. They'd never met. My grandfather said, "I was sitting there with my hand in my coat pocket on a gun." They rode away from this house and he said to his brother, "Did you see that girl?" He said, "Yes." My grandfather said, "Well, that's going to be my wife." They had never met or nothing. She wasn't very old but a little bit later on they went off and married. I don't know the particulars. They got together and ran off and married. Somebody told her dad and he said, "Well, let them go to hell." Then they joined this wagon train. This was somewhere around 1875. She was very young. He was 25 and she wasn't over fourteen or fifteen. They got in north of San Francisco. He prospected for different companies. He homesteaded forty acres right out of Calistoga. I don't know how many years they were here. My mother was born in 1883. She was eight years old when they left here. That would have made it 1891 when they left here to go back. I think they went from here to Coffeyville, Kansas and they stayed there awhile. Somebody they knew had gone to Arkansas. They wound up going to Arkansas and they just stayed.

After I got far enough in school I saw the pictures of grape vineyards and the geography.

M.N.: Could your mother talk about it?

Holliday: She remember quite a little bit about it.

M.N.: Did you talk to your grandparents about it?

Holliday: Not really. I never thought much about talking to them then. You know how important that would be to me now, if I just had a chance to talk to them now.

M.N.: You always had this feeling about California?

Holliday: Always wanted to come. I had just about given up on the thing and the opportunity came then in 1937. So we just up and came.

M.N.: You mentioned something to me earlier about characteristics of different crops.

Holliday: Well, you have to grow some of them very short, especially potatoes. You can grow them and get them out of the way. Sweet corn is a real short crop. Cotton takes longer than any, to me, to take that little seed and plant it. Then watch it turn out of the ground and just keep growing. Pretty soon all the green bolls are on there. Then, they just burst out into the white cotton. There is just something about that that I like. I'd rather grow cotton than any crop we ever hooked up with.

M.N.: You started all over again every year?

Holliday: Yes. Now you take alfalfa. You get your ground ready and plant it and it comes up. You've got to have someone cut it and bale it about every 28 to 30 days. It's there for three or four years. But I'd still rather grow cotton.

M.N.: How many kinds of crops have you grown?

Holliday: We've grown cotton, corn, alfalfa, sugar beets, safflower, guayule, barley, wheat, sweet corn.

M.N.: When did you grow guayule?

Holliday: We grew a lot of it around here during the war years. It wasn't all that good but the government was taking all the rubber they could get.

M.N.: What was the hardest crop?

Holliday: There's not any of them really hard if you manage to keep your rotation going right.

M.N.: Explain the rotation to me.

Holliday: If you cultivate and irrigate at the right time, all the time, and keep it on schedule there isn't any of them hard to grow. That's the whole thing. If you can keep your rotation and schedules right, why there isn't any of them real hard. We used to try to water cotton every fifteen or sixteen days. We could get that up to eleven or twelve days as it began to fruit real heavy. If you own a partnership well or canal water that's on a schedule, you can't do this. If you have your own well then you can ease that up to every twelve days.

M.N.: How did you do it in Arkansas?

Holliday: The fellow up above watered Arkansas. It was all rain water.

M.N.: Did it grow as well?

Holliday: It didn't grow as well. One bale to the acre back there was a bumper crop. We have what we call skip row cotton here. We have done four and a quarter bales to the acre. A bale an acre back there was a good crop.

M.N.: What's skip row?

Holliday: You'd plant two and skip one or you could plant two and skip two. Under the government program they would accept it either way you wanted to go. You could skip two rows and you'd make that much more cotton.

M.N.: Why would you make more cotton?

Holliday: It just produces more. Thicker you get it the less you make.

M.N.: Is that in total or per plant?

Holliday: Actually per plant. If you would have planted it solid why you would have had a little over two bales.

M.N.: So you almost doubled it by skip row.

Holliday: The best we ever grew was three and a half bales solid planted. For a number of years we averaged three bales to the acre with solid planting.

M.N.: What's a bale worth today?

Holliday: It's worth about \$450 a bale now.

M.N.: How much was it back in Arkansas?

Holliday: When I was growing back there I sold some for a nickel a pound.

M.N.: How much does a bale weigh?

Holliday: Five hundred pounds. That would be \$25.

M.N.: When you came to California did you really have high expectations?

Holliday: Well, I hoped. I hoped. Then, when I could have gotten into the farming business here, the figures are scary. It takes so much money to get in it kind of scared an old easterner.

M.N.: Did you you have any idea what you were going to do when you got to California?

Holliday: Well I knew I was going to work on a farm. Farming was my life.

END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 1 (Side 2 is blank)

Session Three April 14, 1981

M.N.: Last time we reached the point where you arrived at the train at midnight.

Holliday: We got a taxi for \$5 to bring us to Arvin at midnight. That was pretty reasonable.

M.N.: What happened when you got here?

Holliday: I got here Sunday night at midnight and I went to work Saturday morning.

M.N.: Who did you go to work for ?

Holliday: E.O. Mitchell, Incorporated. I've been with them ever since.

M.N.: How many years is that?

Holliday: It will be 43 years this July.

M.N.: What did you start out doing?

Holliday: The first day I cut weeds and cotton. I did that for a little while. I'd had a lot of experience with farming for myself with teams and handling horses. Most of the hay raking was done with horses then so then they turned one of those over to me to rake hay.

I was 24 years old. I did that till the hay season ended. In the winter season we had to get the ground all ready and put in the wheat. We did that all with tractors. I raked the hay for possibly three or four years each summer. Then we got a Buick Yellow Cab. We cut it off short and mounted a rake on it. That was much better than the teams.

M.N.: How big was this farm?

Holliday: At the largest point it reached about 2200 acres of irrigated stuff and about 8000 acres of dry land--wheat and barley. It was a fair size outfit.

M.N.: How many people worked for the Mitchells?

Holliday: 25 or 30 steady. At harvest time cotton picking was all done by hand. There wasn't any mechanical pickers. There would be anywhere from 150 to 200 people in the fall of the year.

M.N.: Do you remember how much you were paid when you first started?

Holliday: The first two weeks I drew 25¢ an hour. Then I went to 30¢ an hour. The war came along then in 1941 and the wages jumped real fast.

M.N.: How much were you making when you finished.

Holliday: When I retired I was drawing \$700 a month salary plus I usually got a bonus extra at the end of the year.

M.N.: What was your job when you finished?

Holliday: I worked on the farm for seven years and then I was put in charge of all the row crop and the irrigated stuff. It was more than one man could handle. I had to have a helper right away. As we went along we figured out better ways to handle it. We hired another man and instead of one man being responsible for one crop we would have one man responsible for so much land. Whatever was on that land was his responsibility. That way we wouldn't be tracking around behind each other. It saved a lot of time. I was supposed to retire in 1976 but I still go back and plant cotton each year. I was in charge of whatever was on the amount of land that I was responsible for.

M.N.: How old are you now?

Holliday: I'm 68 right now.

M.N.: Still working.

Holliday: Still working.

M.N.: Let's go back. What were you doing exactly in that first two week period?

Holliday: I spent most of that time just weeding cotton.

M.N.: What did you do when you weeded cotton?

Holliday: You just take a hoe and go around and cut the weeds out of the rows of cotton. There's no way to plow it out so you have to take it out with a hoe.

M.N.: What time would you start work?

Holliday: We worked ten hours a day. We started at six in the morning and quit at five in the evening.

M.N.: Did you think it was hard work?

Holliday: No. That wasn't too hard because I was kind of used to that sort of thing. I did that all my life so I knew about that.

M.N.: Did you think when you got off that train that you'd have a job right away?

Holliday: There was no guarantee of it. There were so many people here that didn't have them but I had an idea that I would.

M.N.: Was it a hope or a wish?

Holliday: I guess you could call it both. When I got here I went out and met the son, Ray Mitchell, and told him I was available if he happened to need anyone.

M.N.: How did you find out about him?

Holliday: I had a brother that worked here. It was no problem to meet him. The son was in charge of all of the farming. They didn't have a foreman at that time and he was doing it.

M.N.: What did your brother do?

Holliday: He did about the same thing. He and I worked together in the hay a lot.

M.N.: He was already a trusted employee?



Holliday: Oh yes. A little later he was in charge of the crews. He was already established. So I just let Ray know that I was here and available. I didn't push it or anything. So Friday night he sent word by my brother for me to be ready Saturday morning to go to work. Saturday morning I went to work. I did that off and on all summer.

M.N.: What did you do in the winter?

Holliday: In the winter we would have to prepare all the land again to replant. We'd cut up all the stalks, plow all the ground, disk it, and plow it. Then we'd have to seed all the wheat. Getting it in with that many acres was a big chore. The earlier you get it in in the fall of the year the more winter rains it got and the better yield you got. We'd run day and night. That would be twelve hour runs. We'd run tractors and drills day and night.

M.N.: Pretty cold out here during the winter isn't it?

Holliday: It's dang cold. It was really cold but it had to be done. We thought we had to have a job so we didn't think anything about it. It worked out real good. It was something that I enjoyed doing. In 1944 I had started doing lots of leveling with heavy equipment.

M.N.: How did you get into that?

Holliday: We did a lot of leveling and re-leveling on their own land. There was new stuff going in all the time. They had the equipment. The other fellows would hire the equipment and I would go out and do the job. It was real big business for quite some time. You see there wasn't anything south of Sycamore Road. Just a block now and then and a few scattered farms around south of Sycamore Road all the way to the mountains. It was just all desert. It wasn't steep but it wasn't level either. You couldn't irrigate it at all. It had to be level enough to irrigate.

M.N.: Now that's all leveled?

Holliday: Yes. All the way to the mountains.

M.N.: Someone driving through there now might think that it had always been level.

Holliday: Sycamore Road is one mile south of Arvin. There just wasn't anything south of there.

M.N.: This is 20 miles over the mountain?

Holliday: Oh, it must be every bit of that. Going west it was almost as bad until you got over to Maricopa. There was lots of open land when we first came here.

M.N.: What other changes have you seen?

Holliday: Everything went from hand labor to mechanical labor. I suppose the greatest was probably the cotton picker and the mechanical potato digger.

M.N.: What were some of the problems they had with the cotton picker?

Holliday: Really not too many problems. The International was the leading machine and it didn't have a lot of problems. They brought out a new picker that didn't quite stand up. They had to take it back off the market. It was built in Arkansas. They recalled it. When they came out with it the next time, why it was a pretty good cotton picker. It didn't catch hold real fast. It was a kind of "wait and see" deal. It must have been somewhere in the late 1940s or early 1950s.

M.N.: Not during the 1930s at all?

Holliday: There were no cotton pickers.

M.N.: The potato digger?

Holliday: The first ones came out in the 1940s and they just kept improving on them. I know during the war we did some custom work. We pulled a machine for a few fellows and it wasn't fully mechanical. It still had to have pickers behind it. That's where they used the prisoners of war picking potatoes.

M.N.: Were they German prisoners?

Holliday: No Japanese. They had a Japanese prison camp over here by Lamont.

M.N.: Were they hard workers?

Holliday: They probably did what I would have done just to get by.

M.N.: And you worked with them?

Holliday: We did the mechanical work and they did the picking up. Then they improved the machine to where you did it all right on the machine. You didn't have to pick the potatoes up off the ground anymore.

M.N.: Were these machines developed because of the need to reduce labor during and after the war?

Holliday: Yes. That's the whole thing. It would eventually have come but maybe not so fast. In the beginning it was just single row pickers and then they got into two row pickers. They've got them to where they do a good job now.

M.N.: Really changed farming didn't it?

Holliday: It sure did. Some of them do six, eight and even twelve rows now.

There's no limit hardly to what you can do now. You might say in my 43 years I've seen it go from horses to what it is today. I've gone through the whole process.

M.N.: Is that a good change?

Holliday: Oh, I would think so. If they hadn't it would be a problem now to get that much hand labor to handle that much stuff. You can hardly do it. It's bad enough on the grapes.

M.N.: They require a lot of hand labor?

Holliday: Yes. They're getting machines now that they can, especially juice grapes, go right down the row and take them right off. So that's coming. I would say I've seen a real move forward in agriculture.

M.N.: Did it change the way you felt about farming?

Holliday: No, just made it a little easier. You still have to do just as much thinking now as you ever did or maybe a little more. You don't have to do nearly the labor. They have chemicals to cure the weeds. They have the planters now that plant exactly what you want in the ground so you have no thinning to do.

M.N.: Did you ever witness any labor problems?

Holliday: Yes. I've witnessed some.

M.N.: What kind?

Holliday: Probably the worst that I've witnessed was in 1939. They had a cotton picking strike. That's the worst I've actually seen.

M.N.: What did that involve?

Holliday: They wanted more money for picking cotton just like they do today.

M.N.: Were these Mexican people?

Holliday: No. There were more white people than Mexicans that did that type of work then. They just decided they wouldn't pick unless they got a certain price.

M.N.: Do you remember if it improved?

Holliday: Oh, they got a little more for picking.

M.N.: The strike actually worked?

Holliday: Yes. I guess you could say it worked. It did a lot of good for labor. I certainly don't agree with them.

M.N.: How's that?

Holliday: I don't see why there has to be a lot of destruction, why you couldn't strike and stay off of the job without a lot of destruction and violence.

M.N.: Was there violence and destruction?

Holliday: Oh yes. I remember one particular night that three hay sheds were set on fire within a few minutes of each other. They were all full of hay. It was done for a purpose.

M.N.: Was anyone hurt?

Holliday: No, not particularly.

M.N.: How long did that strike last?

Holliday: Probably two or three weeks. It wasn't too long but that was my first experience with it. I really didn't know what was happening when I first ran into it.

M.N.: How did you come upon it?

Holliday: I was coming home from work when I ran into the convoy of cars. I really didn't think about what it was until I got home. Someone said the cotton pickers were on strike. That was the first I knew about it really.

M.N.: What did you do?

Holliday: I turned around and came back down to the office. I guess I stayed there two or three hours.

M.N.: Did you work in the fields while the strike was on?

Holliday: They didn't bother us other than just the people that were directly involved in cotton picking. Of course, they had to pull it to the gin and if [the strikers] got a chance to throw a cigarette or something into the trailer load of cotton [there would be problems].

M.N.: Would that set it on fire?

Holliday: Oh yes. That will set it on fire unless you're going down the road and you've got the air coming.

M.N.: Did they do that?

Holliday: I wouldn't definitely say they did it. We sure had a lot more fires when they were striking than when they weren't.

M.N.: How did the farmers feel about the strike?

Holliday: Like everybody else, I suppose they didn't want to pay any more than they had to pay. Naturally they weren't 100% for it.

M.N.: Do you think the workers were justified in asking for extra money?

Holliday: In a lot of cases, yes.

M.N.: Why was it necessary for them to have to resort to a strike?

Holliday: I don't really think the majority of people would have done this. You get somebody that talks this thing up and you can get a whole group of people to do something. Of course, the bigger the volume, the more effect it has. If they shut down the whole Valley as far as picking was concerned, why sure, they were going to win a point.

M.N.: Did these organizers come from a local area or were they from someplace else?

Holliday: I never knew. One of the organizers is all that I ever knew. He originally was from Oklahoma.

M.N.: Where did he get his training?

Holliday: I really don't know. I just knew the man and that's all.

M.N.: What kind of person was he?

Holliday: I never had any dealings of any kind with him.

M.N.: Were there other strikes after that?

Holliday: Oh yes, later on it was mostly fruit.

M.N.: That takes care of your work. What about your social life when you first came out here. Did you have time for any social life?

Holliday: We were a lot busier in the early part. We did spend a lot of time, seven days a week, Viola and the family went to church. When I didn't work I went to church with them.

M.N.: Here in Arvin?

Holliday: Yes. Now this was in 1938. We started going down there to the Congregational.

END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 1

M.N.: You started going down where?

Holliday: To the Union Congregational Church here in Arvin. We went along

until 1946 before we had our membership moved from Arkansas out here. We were affiliated with the Methodist Church. We had our letter transferred to the Union Congregational Church here.

M.N.: Was church important to you at that time?

Holliday: It always has been. The church has always has been important to me.

M.N.: What did it do for you?

Holliday: It always gave me something I couldn't get anywhere else really. In fact, if I had the opportunity, I would have liked to have been a minister. It always has been important. We've always gone to church and as our family grew up they always went to church. In later years we'd take offices in the church from time to time on the Board of Trustees and the Board of Deacons.

M.N.: It must have been a great inconvenience. You were tired when you came home.

Holliday: It was never much effort to go to church. I don't know why. I couldn't explain it. I don't suppose you could understand but it was never much of an effort for me to go to church. It was no problem.

M.N.: What did you do when you went there?

Holliday: A lot of the time we'd be in the choir.

M.N.: You said your father liked to sing.

Holliday: Yes.

M.N.: Don't suppose you got that from him.

Holliday: I don't know. Anyway I spent a lot of time in the choir. We both did until our health kind of gave out. Then when we went into building the church down here. I was chairman of the Board of Trustees when we went to build the present church that we have now. We've spent a lot of time in that and the pulpit committee. Their job is, if you run out of pastor, they call a new one.

M.N.: What kind of people did you go to church with?

Holliday: It's a farming community. It so happened a lot of the farmers went to this particular church. You could say just about any walk of life almost was in the church.

M.N.: Were there other people there with your background?

Holliday: Oh yes. Most of the people out of Oklahoma and Arkansas are either

Baptists or Assembly of God. There weren't as many in this particular church as there would have been in some of the others but there were a lot of them.

M.N.: Did you run into a lot of people from Oklahoma, Texas or Arkansas?

Holliday: Oh yes, all the time. Nearly everybody was an Okie or Arkie at that time.

M.N.: You mean here in Arvin?

Holliday: Yes. We had no problem running into other people and quite often people that you actually knew back there.

M.N.: Were they good people?

Holliday: Oh fine. Most of them.

M.N.: Were they honest?

Holliday: Most of them were. You always find a few people who were not honest but most people are honest.

M.N.: Were most of these people religious?

Holliday: Oh not most of them. A large percentage was. I think the people in the east go to church more than they do here. There was a large percent of them that were Christian people.

M.N.: Did you witness difficulties that other people had?

Holliday: I've seen lots of people live out on ditch banks and canal banks. They didn't have a place to live and really just put up a little tent for shelter.

M.N.: That was fairly comfortable wasn't it?

Holliday: Well, I wouldn't say so. I think they were used to better than that. People thought that if they came to California everything would be all right. It just didn't turn out that way. There were so many people and there's only so many jobs. Everybody couldn't get a job. If they could hang on until harvest time in potatoes or cotton then a lot more people could work. Then when it came back down to wintertime it got pretty short again. Then, when you get up to the spring of the year, you began to chop cotton. All this was done by hand and then you could use lots of people.

M.N.: It looks to me like you'd have a lot of uncertainty when that harvest finished.

Holliday: Well, there had to be. There had to be a lot of it.

M.N.: What kept a man going?

Holliday: I just really don't know. Of course, I was busy all the time and I just didn't follow it. I know there had to be some hardships. I was kind of glad when a lot of the mechanical equipment began to come in.

M.N.: Why was that?

Holliday: It just seemed like it made more work for people to do in the factories. It just seemed like they kind of drifted away.

M.N.: The war made a big change?

Holliday: It was never the same after that really.

M.N.: How did the war effect your life?

Holliday: I don't think it made any difference in my life. Sure, I had relatives go to the war. My son went a little bit later. I really don't think that the war affected me that much. We were real busy producing and we had our job just like the boys over there had their job. We had to have the supplies. It really didn't affect me that much.

M.N.: Did you feel that it was important to produce?

Holliday: Oh, we knew it was important that we produce so we did our best.

M.N.: I know you did. I can't imagine you not doing your best. Let's look back now. How do you look at your life? How do you see it?

Holliday: I feel that I've had a very pleasant life. Of course, we've had problems with sickness and this sort of thing. Other than that, why we've always been able to move forward. It's just been a good average life I would say. I don't know of anything I would change.

M.N.: Do you feel your religion has been sustaining for you?

Holliday: Oh, I think so, yes. I think so very much. I would have liked to have been a minister if things would have been right, but they just weren't. I guess it wasn't intended for me.

M.N.: Why did you want to be a minister?

Holliday: I've just felt that I would have liked to have been a minister. I've held a lot of offices in the church but I've never filled the pulpit on any occasion.

M.N.: You wanted to be a minister, but you actually were a farmer. How do



you reconcile that?

Holliday: I guess I was born into farming so I just stayed there.

M.N.: Did it ever bother you that you didn't get to do what you really wanted to do?

Holliday: Oh, I've had thoughts about it, sure. Maybe I had a chance to serve my life in other ways. I've helped a lot of people over the years with jobs and stuff like that.

M.N.: Still, that feeling has always shaped your life?

Holliday: I don't feel that I completely missed out by any means. I hope that I've helped a lot of young people over some rough places.

END OF INTERVIEW

Fonzo Shackelford  
b. 1894, Arkansas

LaCora Farley  
b. 1897, Texas

[His parents from Okla./Arkansas]

[Her parents from Alabama]

Viola Elizabeth Shackelford

b. 1916, Board Camp, Polk  
County, Arkansas

Education: some business  
college courses

Church: Congregational

m. 1931 →

Grover C. Holliday

b. 1912, Mt. Ida,  
Montgomery County,  
Arkansas

Netta Lou  
b. 1932  
Realtor

Bruce  
b. 1937  
d. 1940

Patti  
b. 1940  
Secretary

Jimmy  
b. 1941  
Buyer, Kern Ridge  
Oil Company

John P. Holliday  
b. 1882, Arkansas  
[His parents from Tennessee]

Maggie Simpson  
b. 1883, California  
[Her parents from Ohio & Missouri]

Grover Cleveland Holliday  
b. 1912, Mt. Ida, Montgomery  
County, Arkansas  
  
Education: high school  
  
Church: Methodist and  
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Viola E. Shackelford  
b. 1916, Board Camp,  
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Netta Lou  
b. 1932  
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Bruce  
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d. 1940

Patti  
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Secretary

Jimmy  
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